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Agca Names His Handlers

For about a year, Italian investigators have been quoting Mehmet Ali Agca as saying he received orders to shoot Pope John Paul II from the Soviet secret police — the K.G.B. — and Bulgarian accomplices. Last week, Mr. Agca said it in public for the first time.

In a surprise encounter with reporters, he said he had been "trained by special experts in international terrorism" in Bulgaria and Syria. "I have said the attempt against the Pope was made by Bulgarian services," Mr. Agca called out as he was being led from a hearing on the kidnapping of a Vatican employee's daughter. "And the K.G.B.?" a reporter shouted. "Yes, the K.G.B.," said Mr. Agca. Sergei Ivanov Antonov, the Bulgarian airline official arrested in Rome "was my accomplice," and so were two Bulgarian Embassy employees.

A friend of the missing girl had received a telephone call from a man claiming to be her abductor who demanded Mr. Agca's release. The Turkish terrorist, who is serving a life prison term for the May 1981 shooting in St. Peter's Square in which the Pope was seriously wounded, denied any knowledge of the girl's abduction.

The Soviet news agency, Tass, said Mr. Agca's statements were "nothing more than absurd insinuations" intended to divert attention from "the true organizers and inspirers of acts of terrorism who are closely linked with neo-Fascist circles and the American C.I.A." Lawyers for Mr. Antonov said Mr. Agca's statements were false. They expressed surprise that a man in his position would be permitted to speak freely to reporters. A police duty officer said the decision to let Mr. Agca talk was "delicate" and suggested it was likely to have been made at a high level.

Milt Freudenheim
and Henry Ginzler